

March 20, 2013

Confirmation Hearing

Capitol Building, Room 330

My name is Frank Allen. I live in Missoula. I'm a former dean of the University of Montana School of Journalism, a former president of a local school board (in another state), a former editor for *The Wall Street Journal* and the founder of a Montana-based educational nonprofit. Ever since I first met Pat Williams in 1996, I have known him to be an honest and dedicated public servant who always has the best interests of Montana at heart.

What makes an excellent Montana regent? What kinds of credentials and characteristics does this committee want a regent to have? Is the appointment of Pat Williams as regent in the best interest for our state and its university system?

I have studied the biographies of all of the other current Montana regents. These are talented and accomplished people. They are solid citizens. They bring to the assignment a broad range of experiences—for example, in teaching, finance, entrepreneurship, economic development, museum administration, municipal affairs and tribal management. I think Pat Williams makes a strong member of the Board of Regents because he brings significant additional experiences and perspectives.

We all know that Pat was Montana's lone congressman for nine terms—serving and representing the people of our state for an unprecedented 18 consecutive years. Pat got to keep the job of congressman for so long because, week after week, year in and year out, he traveled all over Montana to meet with us in our respective communities, to listen, to observe, and to learn about our concerns. I contend that Pat's extensive congressional experience is highly relevant preparation for being a regent!

There's more: Pat has been involved in teaching and education administration for more than three decades. As a young man, he taught in his hometown of Butte. Most recently, he taught courses forestry, geography and political science at the University of Montana. While in Congress, Pat served on the Education & Labor Committee. He sponsored federal legislation that created the Mansfield Center and the Leopold Wilderness Research Institute at UM, and led the federal legislative effort to create the Agricultural Plant Research Center at MSU in Bozeman. For about half a dozen of those years, he was also the chair or the senior ranking member of the House Subcommittee on Post-Secondary Education. He helped establish Montana's seven tribal colleges. He spent six years in leadership roles for the National Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges—giving guidance to boards of regents all across the nation. Such a combination of breadth and specialization translates into valuable perspectives that can help the Board of Regents do its work more effectively.

Finally, the Board of Regents is a governing body—not a group of vacuous cheerleaders. Regents must make tough decisions, shape policies, scrutinize practices, and, above all, must speak their minds in order to correct bad practices and remedy weaknesses. Some Grizzly football fans choose to misinterpret Pat's recent words to the New York Times. They want to block his nomination. If we insist on rejecting and obstructing worthy candidates for public office simply because something they once said has offended a small group of people, then we will never have a Legislature...or a Board of Regents.

Frank Allen

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